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## All Bark and No Bite: India at Tate Britain's 'Artist and Empire' Exhibition

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## **All Bark and No Bite: India at Tate Britain's 'Artist and Empire' Exhibition**

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The 'Artist and Empire' Exhibition which opened 23<sup>rd</sup> November at Tate Britain is a long overdue show that aims to square aesthetics with a reckoning with Britain's imperial past. This is a tall order, and the gallery has been lauded by the press for taking this on. But should this not be its very remit, certainly since the rebranding of the Millbank site as Tate Britain in 2000? So why credit the institution with putting on a show that one would and should expect? After all, the empire is central to British history and has garnered considerable public attention since its demise. We have for example had the Raj nostalgia of the 80s, and the flourishing of post-colonial theory in the 1980s and 1990s which shone a spotlight on issues of empire, instigating deep debates. So how can it be that as late as 2015 this exhibition can lay claim to being a first and to get applauded for doing so at all, whatever its limitations may be?

Tate Britain acknowledges the exhibition's belatedness. In its defense, it points to the conference 'Art and the British Empire' held at Tate Britain in 2001 so as to spotlight exhibitions such as '1807: Blake, Slavery and the Radical Mind' in 2007, the 'Lure of the East' exhibition in 2008, the more recent show 'Migrations, Journeys into British Art' in 2012 and the focus display 'Thin Black Line(s)', also in 2012, curated by Lubaina Himid. Most of these are small spotlight shows however and 'Lure of the East' can hardly be called a critical assessment of imperial legacies.

The exhibition's lateness however is less coincidental than symptomatic of the present state of art and politics in relation to empire, migration and funding of the arts. For one, Tate Britain, as a national British gallery devoted solely to British art, inherited a collection that only features a small number of works by British artists who ventured further afield, and holds even fewer pieces by subject peoples of the vast British empire.

Works of art and artefacts from the Indian subcontinent are for example mostly found in the Victoria and Albert Museum which inherited the collections of the East India Company. Here we encounter a first colonial legacy to be faced which the exhibition however does not address: the firm belief that the Indian race was not capable of producing cultural artefacts worthy of being called fine art but excelled in design; an acknowledgement that did not challenge nineteenth-century racist conceptions of European superiority and hence could be readily granted. In fact, it was considered a marker of civilizational advance to have lost the touch of design excellence deemed a more gutsy skill<sup>1</sup> and it was hence only 'natural' to bequeath the collection of the East India Company to the museum of design per excellence: the Victoria and Albert Museum.

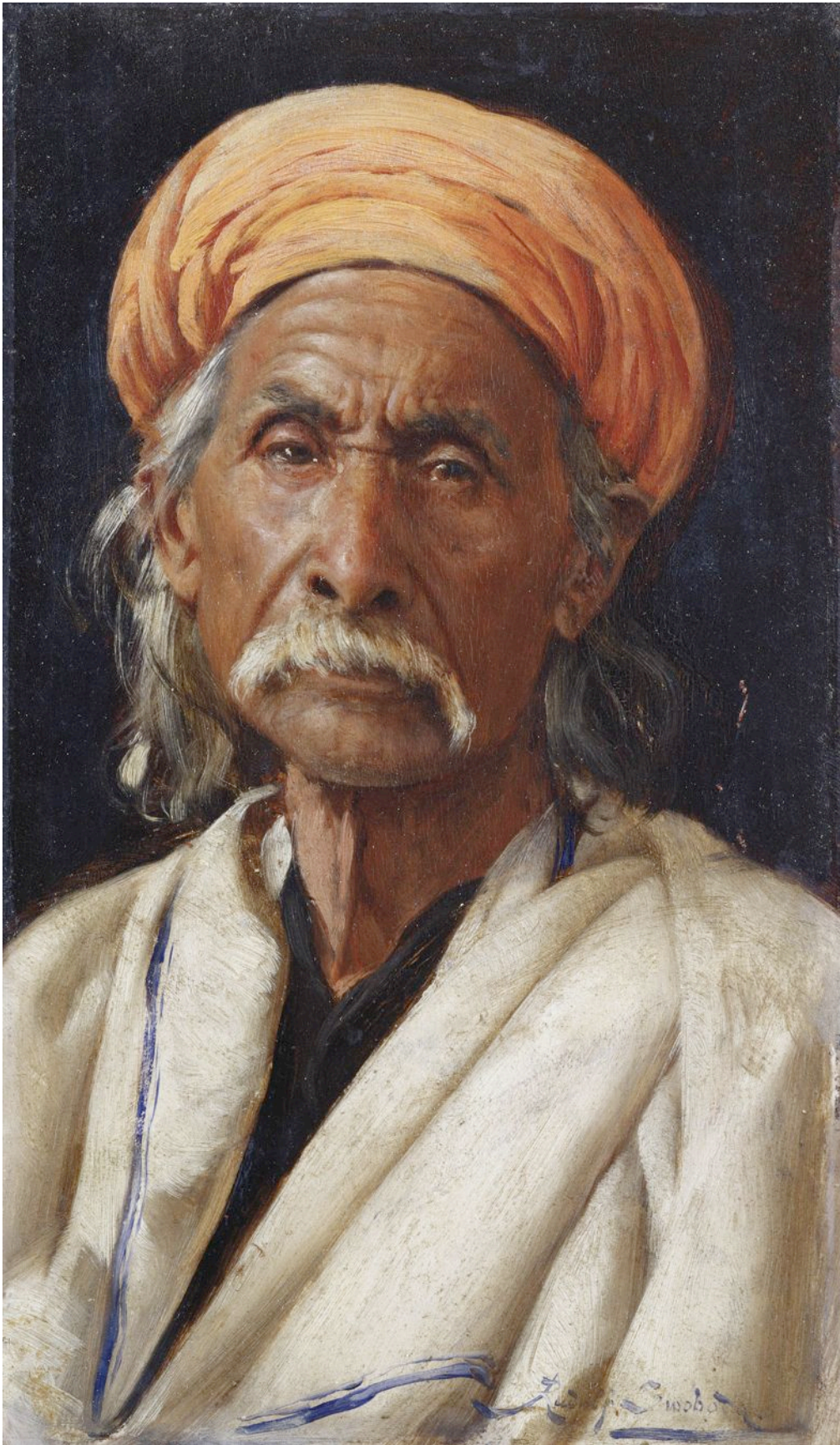
But it was not only artefacts that ended up in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Paintings depicting scenes from British India were also deposited there if they were not painted in the naturalist style that was considered the pinnacle of civilization. A case in point is 'Company Painting'. This hybrid Indo-European style evolved when Indian artists emulated European naturalism yet retained some Indian idioms for works commissioned by British patrons in India. Yet surprisingly even magnificent oils that depict exotic landscapes and present picturesque views of the far flung corners of the British empire and that were painted in perfectly academic mode have on the whole also failed to gain access to the hallowed halls of high art. It turns out that even at the time their status was marred by association: trade, exploration, science, empire in other words. We thus find William Hodges' 'Cascade Cove, Dusky Bay' (1775) in the National Maritime Museum, and Thomas Baines' 'Figures Painted on Rocks and Carved on a Gouty Stem Tree' (c. 1850) in the collection of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. And even Robert Home's 'The Reception of the Mysorean Hostage Princes by Marquis Cornwallis, 26 February 1792' (c. 1793), a history painting if ever there was one that furthermore was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1797, is found in the collection of the National Army Museum.<sup>2</sup>



Robert Home, *The Reception of the Mysorean Hostage Princes by Marquis Cornwallis*, 26 February 1792, c. 1793, oil paint on canvas, 1492 x 2025mm, National Army Museum

But even work that had gained access to eminent collections in the past, or that was commissioned by the *crème de la crème* suffered from a lack of aesthetic appreciation. Examples here are Francis Hayman's 'Robert Clive and Mir Jafar after the Battle of Plassey' (1757) owned by the National Portrait Gallery<sup>3</sup>, and exquisite Indian portraits commissioned from the artist Rudolf Swoboda by Queen Victoria.<sup>4</sup>





Rudolf Swoboda, *Bakshiram*, 1886, oil paint on panel. 260 x 159 mm, Royal Collection Trust/ © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2015

And this is not all. A further factor one might cite to make sense of the show's belatedness is the very conception of British art itself. This is epitomized by what one might call Tate Britain's split identity. On the one hand the remit of what constitutes British Art has vastly expanded in the contemporary field, as Turner Prize nominations demonstrate where work in non-traditional media are accepted as art, and non-British nationals that live and work in Britain qualify for nomination. Yet when it comes to the British empire the understanding of British Art, surprisingly, is far less expansive. So how can this be? Contemporary art's global turn has for sure expanded horizons, and national perspectives seem positively anathema to its ethos. But it seems this global outlook is retained within the confines of the contemporary and does not affect notions of British art of previous centuries. And there is more. This historic understanding of British art harbours an entrenched separation between the 'green and pleasant land' and its colonies that affected the writing of history and art history of Britain and its empire. British historians thus considered the history of Britain their purview, while imperial historians engaged with the history of empire, resulting in a deep disconnect between metropole and colony.<sup>5</sup> This separation of spheres, however, was even more prevalent in art history as the fact that there is no art historical equivalent to imperial history demonstrates. The arts of empire rather fell through the crack and until relatively recently hardly figured in art historical discussions<sup>6</sup>, even though images of empire made a regular appearance in the galleries of the metropole and also abounded in nineteenth-century British mass image culture. The message is clear: the metropole was the only place where real art happened. Yet like history, art history has gone through many revisions, with 'new art history' and visual culture initiating prominent shifts in the field that now are no longer new or radical, and it has also been profoundly impacted by post-colonial theory. Yet remarkably, the divide between British art and the art of empire has held surprisingly firm and the arts of empire, as lead curator Alison Smith informs us, have been largely neglected.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Exhibition**

But let's turn to how Tate Britain has opted to address this art historical omission and how it proposes to square the circle of 'art and empire'. The exhibition is organized in six themes and each theme is allocated a room. The first room is dedicated to maps. It highlights the roots of empire in trade, exploration and military conquest, and spells out how central map making, topographies and picturing were to the work of empire.

Maps of course are always an invention based on the conditions that prevail at any given point in time. In a colonial setting they are also a double act that erases indigenous geographies while imposing new spellings, names and borders. They ultimately are about visualizing space according to a preferred narrative, which however, as Walter Crane's 1886 map of the British empire displayed in this room demonstrates, does not always represent a dominant view. This map was reproduced as a large colour supplement in *The Graphic* to mark the Colonial and Indian Exhibition held in London at the time. It however promotes a federated vision of empire as alternative to colonial imperialism. This is mainly argued through Crane's border decorations that include allegorical figures of freedom, fraternity and federation clad with Phrygian caps. And while Crane clearly shows representatives of the colonial power such as a white soldier, a settler and sailor, he also shows an Indian porter weighed down by his burden as well as other indigenous figures that stand proud. Crane adapted these border decorations from a prominent map published for the 1886 exhibition, and it would have been helpful to have this map in the room to compare and grasp the full import of Crane's additions. In tandem they would also have spelled out very poignantly that the British empire was contested even at its peak.





Walter Crane, *Imperial Federation Map*, colour lithograph, 600 x 785 mm, Daniel Crouch Rare Books

The second room is themed 'Trophies of Empire' and refers to the centrality of a widely conceived notion of collecting for the imperial enterprise, ranging from looting to appropriation, but also classification and knowledge production about the peoples and cultures subsumed under the British banner. The chosen theme is somewhat unfortunate however in that it emphasizes material acquisition over the equally, if not more fundamental and entrenching processes of colonial knowledge gathering and the conceptual framing and ossification of aspects of India's indigenous cultures, such as the caste system and religious affiliation. Yet this is still a remarkable and rich room. It presents the curiosity of encounter on a vernacular scale and offers multiple well selected examples of works that speak eloquently of two-way cultural appropriations



not achieved in the other rooms. This in part has to do with size. With the exception of some spectacular paintings on a grand scale, such as Stubbs' 'A Cheetah and a Stag with Indian Attendants' (c. 1764, Manchester City Gallery),<sup>8</sup> the images here are on a more intimate scale and do not seek to impress but invite detailed observation and a stepping closer. This room also allows a glimpse of the largely untold story of amateur art in the colonies such as botanical drawings by Anna Maria (Lady) Jones (1785) which are juxtaposed with an equally sumptuous example of a botanical work by the Indian artist Shaik Zain-ud-Din (1782), considered a Company School painter both loaned by the Royal Asiatic Society. It also presents Hodges' 'Tomb and Distant Views of the Rajmahal Hills' (c. 1782) alongside the drawing 'Façade of the Palace of the Rajas of Tanjore, Tanjore, Madras' (c 1830) by an anonymous South Indian artist that presents an eclectic mix of Indian and European architectural styles, Linneaus Tripe's photograph of the so-called Elliot marbles, that is Buddhist sculptures removed from the Grand Stupa at Amaravati in South-Eastern India and named after their excavator Sir Walter Elliot, and last but not least, Marianne North's sketch of one the Ajanta caves (1878). A truly inspired curatorial arrangement that engages and speaks volumes, potentially at least: Some contextual information might well have facilitated the juxtaposition's intended eloquence.

Room Three entitled 'Imperial Heroics' dedicates an entire room to art that depicts military subjects. It presents paintings that have vanished entirely from public view as such subjects became an embarrassment after the end of empire. It also makes apparent that a shift occurred in the presentation of such scenes towards the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas in the early imperial period only the successful aftermath of a British campaign was heroically depicted, such as Robert Home's propagandistic depiction of imperial benevolence in 'The Reception of the Mysorean Hostage Princes by Marquis Cornwallis' (1792) that eclipses the military campaign prior to the taking of the princes of the region of Mysore as hostage, in the latter half of the nineteenth century war art focused on the common soldier rather than the military commander.

The exhibition in fact draws attention to the genre of the 'Last Stand', a topic that was immensely popular at the time and that celebrated the moral stamina of the ordinary soldier in face of inevitable defeat. In this room we thus find former Royal Academy favourites such as Elizabeth Butler's 1879 celebrated piece 'The Remnants of an Army: Jellalabad, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1842' depicting the aftermath of the first Afghan war.



Elizabeth Butler (Lady Butler), *The Remnants of an Army* 1879, oil paint on canvas, 1321 x 2337 mm, Tate

Enthusiastically received when first shown in the Royal Academy in 1879, turned into a popular engraving, purchased by Sir Henry Tate for his collection and proudly displayed as a national icon until after the Second World War, the painting was subsequently given to the Somerset Military Museum Trust on a long loan, now deemed the appropriate place for war art.<sup>9</sup> But Elizabeth Butler's work fared better than the art of other battle painters whose paintings were also popular and often served as basis for mass-produced illustrations. Their artistic standing however was deemed tainted by

their closeness to reportage and documentation, and they occupied an ambivalent place even in the art world of the period of high empire.<sup>10</sup>

This brings us to several difficulties the curators faced when planning the show. The institutional remit is to uphold the highest standards of what is deemed to be art. Visual references to popular culture and the fascinating interface of fine art, imperial reportage and mass image production eloquently made in the exhibition catalogue are therefore absent in the show and leave a large and central part of the story of 'artist and empire' untold. This omission is heightened by a further constraint the curators laboured under: information panels are limited to 100 words per objects if presented on the wall, and 50 words when placed in display cases. This most unfortunate limitation invokes the spectre of formalism and the entrenched but misguided belief that works of art speak for themselves. Yet as has long been accepted the interpretation of images requires a grasp of cultural codes embedded in the work acquired through education and/or participation in requisite cultural worlds. Images therefore do not speak a universal but always a specific cultural language that needs to be made accessible, especially when they culturally or historically hail from further afield.

The next two rooms themed 'Power Dressing' (Room 4) and 'Face to Face' (Room 5) are more or less focused on portraits, full-length or more intimate, and demonstrate a remarkable penchant by British officials for cultural cross-dressing. This is of interest as postcolonial theory underscores the propensity of colonized peoples to mimic colonizers.<sup>11</sup> Room 4 demonstrates that mimicry played out in both directions, albeit under different parameters. Here real opportunities were missed to examine these relations. Room Five for example shows a caricature of a colonial 'mimic man' or 'bhadralok' as Indians who had adopted a Western habitus were called in the local lingo at the time. This image could well have served as a counterpoint, however only of sorts as this image is small in scale and the grand manner portraits of men in oriental garb are positively cyclopean in comparison, to the many examples of grand British cultural

cross-dressers in Room Four, opening up a debate about the contexts for such changes in attire, and how to understand them. Here it must also be noted that not all cultural cross dressing is made equal. This again speaks to the need to address cultural specifics and to provide further information in the gallery. There were for example two modes of adopting Indian garb. Reynolds' grand portrait of 'Captain John Foote in Mughal dress' speaks of the language of power as Foote appropriates Mughal power through his dress. This anticipated the self-styling of the Raj who adopted the Mughal mode of holding court called 'darbar' to present themselves as successors to the power in the land when the East India Company first set foot in India, most spectacularly so in the famous 1911 Delhi Durbar attended by George V. But there was also a more domestic mode of adopting Indian dress that was accompanied by an, at least partial, adoption of Indian styles of living. This was in evidence mainly in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and often entailed the taking of Indian wives. The British Library's (unfinished) painting attributed to Johann Zoffany which portrays Major William Palmer affectionately looking at his Indian princess wife and their children for example might potentially speak to a more familial mode of responding to indigenous ways.<sup>12</sup> Or the watercolour most likely portraying Sir David Ochterlony, another Company official, in Indian dress, smoking a hookah and watching a nautch in his house at Delhi, c. 1820, also held at the British Library<sup>13</sup>. If these images had been included it would have offered a counter balance to the decontextualized Orientalist posturing in borrowed plumes that dominates this room.





Recently re-attributed to Johann Zoffany, *Major William Palmer with his second wife, the Mughal princess Bibi Faiz Bakhsh*, 1785, oil paint on canvas, 1270 x 1015 mm, British Library

A further point easily missed in the exhibition but documented in the catalogue is the introduction of portraiture by Warren Hastings, India's first Governor-General, to the politics of the Indo-British encounter. In an effort to reduce corruption in the East India Company he encouraged native princes and rulers to replace the valuable gifts exchanged during traditional Mughal gift giving ceremonies in which company officials partook and often pocketing the gifts with the exchange of painted likenesses. Indian rulers were therefore expected to have their portraits painted in a European manner. This constituted a novel departure for Indian culture and also provided lucrative commissions for European artists who had ventured to India in search for opportunities.

More often than not this new ceremonial revealed itself a one sided affair as Indian princes frequently did not receive a portrait in return, which turned their gift effectively into a tribute.<sup>14</sup> The awkwardness and unease that characterized portraiture-by-arm-twisting is tangible in the portrait of Madhav Rao Narayan, the Maratha Peshwa by James Wales (1792) which was finished by the Daniells some years after Wales's death.<sup>15</sup> Yet it was not only the sitters who were ill at ease. According to the artist this was a difficult commission as the peshwa imposed many conditions, such as the work's blend of Mughal style miniature painting with European illusionism and the adoption of a history painting format. This image therefore represents an important moment in the history of visual exchange between Britain and India which could well have been highlighted in the exhibition and drawn out as a sub-theme.



James Wales, 'Madhav Rao Narayan, the Maratha peshwa, with Nana Fadnavis and Attendants', 1792, oil paint on canvas, 2280x1860 mm, The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, London

This touches on another omission, in part at least, that affects the exhibition's scope: the quasi erasure of company painting through selecting images that do not make its hybrid nature evident. The botanical drawing by Shaik Zain-ud-Din that was already mentioned is for example visually hardly distinct from the drawing by Lady Jones it is juxtaposed with. And while this does make the welcome point about the equal ability of Indian artists, it on the other hand does not allow the gallery visitor to become acquainted with this very significant school of art that evolved through the colonial encounter in British India. The inclusion of some salient examples of this school showing Indian topography and prominent sites would also have been beneficial, and would for example have been well suited to the theme of Room One. The inclusion of such examples would also have facilitated the development of a mental trajectory of the Indian visual response to Britain's colonial presence and aesthetic interventions, and would have offered a point of transition to what comes across as a sudden appearance of modern Indian art, seemingly out of the blue, in the last room (Room Six). In fact it would appear that the work by Indian artists is 'slipped in on the quiet' in the first five rooms of the show. One way to read this is to suggest that it flags up the prevailing impact of a mental separation between British art and empire already mentioned. Is this where Tate Britain trips itself up one wonders by upholding notions of aesthetic value and of British art that have long been expanded in contemporary settings, barring what might be conceived of as the artistically 'inferior' hybrid work of the Company School?

To the curators' credit the portrait of a houseboy by Manchershaw Pithawalla (1898) is for example included in Room 5. Pithawalla was so successful that he was given a one-man show in the Doré Gallery in London in 1911, the first Indian artist to do so. It is hung next to Abanindranath Tagore's watercolour 'A Music Party' c 1905. The



juxtaposition of these two works speaks volumes about the transition from Indian artists the come through the government art school system and adopt academic art and artists that seek alternatives to colonial aesthetics.<sup>16</sup>



Abanindranath Tagore, *The Music Party*, c. 1905, Watercolour on paper, 405 x 255 mm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

This important work can be read as being representative of the Bengal Renaissance - the Indian art movement that broke with British art and which aligned itself with the struggle for nationalism and self-economy – *swadeshi* and which sought to forge a modern, national Indian art style by mining past Indian artistic practices. Again, it is a shame that this seminal watercolour is not foregrounded more in the display or drawn

attention to in an information panel: it's presentation feels more like a token gesture towards the formative period of Indian modernity and its relationship with artistic practice.

This brings us to yet another area of concern. Whereas the first five rooms of the exhibition adopt a purposefully synchronic perspective that avoids geographical foci or chronological perspectives, Room Six, the last room of the exhibition, breaks this pattern, adopting a chronological theme. Exhibition visitors move from 'Mapping and Marking', to 'Trophies of Empire', 'Imperial Heroics', 'Power Dressing' and 'Face to Face' to arrive at the final room double-themed 'Out of Empire' and 'Legacies of Empire' respectively. This double room attempts to articulate an increasing aesthetic emancipation of former colonies from colonial tutelage and 'positively' leaps through the struggle for Independence to arrive at an equally compressed presentation of art in the time of the postcolony. Such questionable, extreme compression however is not the main issue, nor the adoption of a chronological perspective per se. What is troubling is that the curation rehearses the very split between art and empire already mentioned. What I mean by this is that here we only find works by artists from former colonies crammed into a small space. The works furthermore are not arranged in a geographically specific manner, and the differences and specificities of the struggle with, and responses to, colonial contexts are hence obscured.

It is as if this artistic legacy of empire had nothing to do with Britain, and as if the process of decolonisation was solely an 'other' affair. Yet as Breckenridge and der Veer have pointed out so long ago in the 1990s the 'postcolonial predicament' does not constitute a condition 'over there' but equally affects the 'here' of the former colonial metropole: The postcolonial predicament applies both to the 'ex-colonizer and the ex-colonized' – a fact decidedly disavowed in this show.<sup>17</sup>

This last room therefore presents itself as a truncated after-thought rather than an integral part of the exhibition. This impression is further heightened by a missing transition in the 'Out of Empire' the first section of this room representative of the period when artists like Pithawalla who had adopted a colonial style of art were celebrated as great Indian artists by the British and the educated Indian elite alike (who however is not presented in this room). The eminence grise missing here is Ravi Varma, the first Indian artist to paint in oils and willing to engage with western academic illusionism as taught and promoted by such institutions as the Royal Academy. He was championed by the British and Indian elites alike as the product of the British colonial process that proved to the world that the colonial civilizing project had worked, as Indian culture now, at long last, had stepped up its game from design to fully fledged fine art. And while his fame only lasted until the arrival of Abanindranath Tagore on the artistic scene, his work nonetheless marks an important milestone the show would have done well to present.

Tate Britain is following well-trodden paths with this omission. Firstly there is the impact of the already cited, long-established conceptual separation between Britain and its empire that dominated the fields of British history and art history and impoverished and misrepresented the history of British art. The second aspect here is the fact that colonial nationalists were just as uneasy about this period of Indian art produced in a western academic idiom. Pushing for self-rule, self-economy, non-cooperation, non-violence and/or Independence, Indian nationalists sought to distance themselves from this art that they came to consider a shameful history of adopting the aesthetic language of the colonizer. Indian histories of the rise of modern Indian art therefore tended to concentrate on the period just after this phase of what one might want to refer to as an Indian academic art. But by following this trend, and by eclipsing this earlier period marked by British intervention in Indian arts through art schools and the steering of Indian artisanal practices, an important history of the British arts of empire remains untold. This is even more surprising as the work of Pithawalla and Abanindranath Tagore

that could relate this history is actually included in Room 5 of the exhibition, but its presentation does not allow for the significance of the work to transpire.

'Out of Empire' however, even if patchy and ultra-condensed, does assemble a unique juxtaposition of three copies of Buddhist murals from the Ajanta caves that potentially bring alive an aspect of the legacy of British artistic intervention in India. The Buddhist caves had been rediscovered in 1819 by the British and in 1844 the British government sponsored a project to copy the frescos. Twenty-seven facsimiles in oil were subsequently shipped to London. These works were initially installed in the East India Company's museum but then shown at the Great Exhibition and then Crystal Palace in Sydenham where they went up in flames in 1866 when the venue burned down. In 1872 a new team led by John Griffiths, the Superintendent of the Bombay art school, was commissioned to copy the frescos all over again, and who brought some of his Indian students in on the project. The murals were now also taken up by Indian nationalists who championed them as a highpoint of a past golden age of Indian art declaring them a basis for a new national Indian art. As part of this invention of a new cultural tradition a direct line of descent was declared from Buddhist art to Bengal folk art such as Kalighat paintings which subsequently inspired the work of Jamini Roy also shown in this room. Mughal art was also drawn into this equation and argued as expressive of an Indian national spirit that had transformed Mughal art's foundational Persian elements into a uniquely Indian art form.





John Griffiths, *The Temptation of the Buddha by Mara* (copy of a Mural inside Cave 1 at Ajanta), 1875-76, oil paint on canvas, 2445x2500 mm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

An interpretation of Ajanta's murals combined with other elements such as Mughal art and some references to European illusionism for example informed the art of the Bengali Renaissance represented by the work Abanindranath Tagore, and numerous Indian artists also copied the frescos in search for an authentically Indian style of art. A fair number of them took part in yet another team of copyists that ventured to the

caves, this time under the lead of Christiana Herringham, a British artist and art patron with an interest in art conservation. Her water colour copy of a fragment in cave 17 displayed alongside Griffith's earlier copy demonstrate a shift in evaluation of the frescoes. Griffiths' interest in the murals had evolved from his interest in decoration and his approach was mainly documentary. Herringham, however, was a member of the India Society that had been formed in London in 1910 to promote Indian art. The Society sought to counter entrenched racial ideas to the tune that there was no true art in India as Indians supposedly were not sufficiently evolved to bring forth artistic genius. Her project was therefore less focused on documentation but rather sought to foreground the artistic spirit of the work and her piece is more evocative than Griffith's. The third Ajanta sketch is by 'India's Frida Kahlo': the Indo-Hungarian artist Amrita Sher-Gil. It represents a further phase in the development of Indian art characterised by a turn towards European modern art. Sher-Gil found inspiration for an Indian approach to the simplification of forms in the Ajanta murals and she saw these studies as a suitable Indian parallel to the work of Gauguin she had seen and admired while studying art in Paris. The co-presentation of these three works therefore successfully references three major moments in the history of art and empire in British India that however might have been flagged up more so viewers can appreciate their significance.

The second part of Room Six 'Legacies of Empire' has set itself an even more impossible task. It offers an uneven time lapse through an eclectic selection of works that cannot do justice to the import of the theme. Yet again more information would have been helpful. And the fact that this room farms out the dealing with the colonial legacy to the former colonized is highly problematic. A crucial opportunity has therefore been missed as this segregation rehearses and reinforces the very Britain-And-Empire split the concept of British art suffers from and the exhibition ostensibly is seeking to redress.

And there are further questions. As far as India's post-Independence story is concerned one wonders why the Singh Twins were selected to stand in for this period. In fact one

could argue this choice as quite problematic, as it suggests post-colonial Indian art is wedded to what could be seen as an 'indigenous' mode of painting. This choice also rehearses the double standard Indian artists who opted to work in modern styles were subjected to: they were called derivative for employing such styles and were pushed to use Indian visual idioms deemed 'authentic', while European artists concerned with what we can loosely term Primitivism freely appropriated visual forms from around the globe without ever being subjected to the charge of inauthenticity.

A further observation is that the art in this last room would have had much greater impact if it had been distributed throughout the earlier rooms dialoguing with the spectacular work of early and high imperialism on show. This juxtaposition would have opened up the issue of art and empire, and prompted debate. It would also have offered an inherent reflexivity that the one contemporary piece by Tony Phillips in Room Three just cannot deliver. This might also have drawn out other issues to do with 'facing the legacy' of the British empire that have not been addressed by the show, such as the scientific racism prevalent in the latter half of the nineteenth century. And it might have offered the opportunity to introduce institutional self-reflexivity by pointing, for example, to the links between sugar production and Henry Tate's fortune.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Victorian race theory Indian art was seen as purely decorative and barbaric and the high art India was able to lay claim to, like Buddhist sculptures in Gandhara, North India, were credited to imitating foreign, in this instance Greek forms rather than Indian creativity. See for example John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin* Forgotten Books, London, 1905; repr. 2013, pp 306-7; James Fergusson, *The History or Indian and Eastern Architecture*, London: John Murray, 1910, p 220; Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, pp 238-49; Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian'*

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*Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, C.1850-1920*, Cambridge South Asian Studies, Cambridge, 2007, pp 119-22.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.nam.ac.uk/collection/collection-news/your-paintings/reception-mysorean-hostage-princes-marquis-cornwallis>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw01347/Robert-Clive-and-Mir-Jafar-after-the-Battle-of-Plassey-1757>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/403826/bakshiram>. The portraits are usually displayed in the corridor leading to the Durbar Hall in Osborne House on the Isle of Wight depicted. They depict ‘artisans’ that were on show working at their crafts in the 1886 Indian and Colonial Exhibition in London, except they were actually prisoners from Agra jail trained in their craft in prison and shipped out to London with their prison guard. See Saloni Mathur, “‘To Visit the Queen’: On Display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886’, in *India by Design. Colonial History and Cultural Display*, ed. Saloni Mathur, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2007, pp 52-80.

<sup>5</sup> See Antoinette Burton, ‘Rules of Thumb: British History and “Imperial Culture” in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain’, in *The New Imperialism Reader*, ed. Stephen Howe, Routledge, London, 2010, pp 42ff.

<sup>6</sup> This was highlighted in the publication that came out of the 2001 conference ‘Art and Empire’ held at Tate Britain. See Timothy Barringer, Geoff Quilley, and Douglas Fordham, *Art and the British Empire*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> See Alison Smith, ‘Introduction’, in *Artist and Empire*, eds. Alison Smith, David Blaney Brown, and Carol Jacobi, Tate Publishing, London, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.artfund.org/supporting-museums/art-weve-helped-buy/artwork/3911/cheetah-and-stag-with-two-indians-george-stubbs>

<sup>9</sup> Alison Smith, David Blaney Brown, and Carol Jacobi, eds., *Artist and Empire, Artist and empire*, p 56.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, Brown and Jacobi, *Artist and empire*, pp 86-7.

<sup>11</sup> Homi Bhabha delineates the notion of mimicry as a colonial strategy of power and

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knowledge that also offers a tool for subversion to the colonized. From the point of view of the colonizer its effectiveness hinges on the perpetuation of a difference that marks the distance between the colonizers and the colonized, a gap the colonized are threatening to close thus subverting and/or mocking colonial power. See Homi Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, New York, 1994, pp 85-92.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/asian-and-african/2015/01/portrait-of-major-william-palmer-and-his-family-now-on-display.html>

<sup>13</sup> See also

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/addorimss/s/019addor0000002u00000000.html>

<sup>14</sup> See Natasha Eaton, 'Between Mimesis and Alterity: Art, Gift, and Diplomacy in Colonial India, 1770-1800', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol 46, no 4, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> See Smith, Blaney Brown, and Jacobi, *Artist and Empire*, p135.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O82562/a-music-party-painting-tagore-abanindranath/>

<sup>17</sup> Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter Van Der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia (New Cultural Studies)*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1993, p 2.